THE ECONOMICS OF JESUS

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Pacific School of
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THE ECONOMICS OF JESUS

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OR

WORK AND WAGES IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

A STUDY OF THE MONEY PARABLES

BY

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A WORD TO THE READER

This little volume deals with a series of problems which often lie heavy on the heart—those arising out of the deep-seated and manifold inequalities of life. Ostensibly they belong to the social order, and constitute a branch of economics; but at root they run into the subsoil of the Providential Government of the World, and can only be solved in the light of spiritual principles. In attempting this solution the writer has codified the teaching of Our Lord on the subject by bringing together, and viewing as aspects of our great exposition, the lessons concerning service and reward in the Kingdom of God which are contained in the "money parables." He ventures to suggest that this method of dealing with Our Lord's teaching is capable of indefinite expansion in other directions. The sayings of Jesus have come down to us largely in detached fragments, expressed often in paradoxical forms, and for the most part they have

been expounded as though the truths they illustrate were equally detached and unrelated. Most of the difficulties of exegesis are due to this lack of imagination in explaining the words of Him "who spake as never man spake." It is only by co-ordinating the scattered portions of His teaching on the problems of experience, and showing how one passage or parable balances and completes the lesson of another, that it begins to shine on us full-orbed, and the laws of the Higher Life are seen in their wonderful beauty and their persuasive truth. Then we see how He who is the "power of God" is also the "wisdom of God," and "in His light we shall see light."

E. GRIFFITH-JONES.

BALHAM.

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THE INEQUALITIES OF LIFE

"Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why didst thou make me thus? Or hath not the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?"—ROM. ix. 20, 21.

CHAPTER I.

THE INEQUALITIES OF LIFE.

"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?"—Rom. xiv. 4.

In looking at the faces composing a great multitude, the first impression is that of their general resemblance, but the more lasting is that of their manifold differences. There is a separateness in which every man dwells—like the ultimate atoms of matter—that can never be bridged over. And what is true of individuality is equally true of circumstance and outward lot. None of us fare alike in this life; each of us pursues a lonely journey across a pathless sea, and though our track may often cross our neighbour's, they never coincide for long. These inner and outer contrasts of human life are the chief source of its unfailing interest; they also constitute some of its most perplexing problems. This little

book is written with a view to considering some of these problems in the light of certain principles revealed in the teaching of Jesus Christ.

I.

Consider for a moment the enthralling interest presented by the variety of human individuality and destiny. By a law of our nature, we do not find the same pleasure in the rigid proportions of symmetry as we do in a rapid or even leisurely movement of development. The static aspects of the Universe do not satisfy us as do the dynamic. The pleasures of still-life soon pall, but the perpetual dramatic interest of experience, with its endless shocks and surprises, is inexhaustible. Genius and mediocrity, virtue and vice, wealth and poverty, good and ill-fortune, success and failure, the ideal and the actual—it is the contemplation of these "variables," with all the gradations that lie between, which fires imagination, inspires art, and makes life a changeful vista full of engrossing fascination to the student of the soul. If this element of contrast suddenly gave place to a monotonous equality of

character and lot, life would instantly lose its salt and savour to beings such as we are. There are no pictures of human life so wearisome and insipid as the Utopias of poets and reformers. We sincerely try to admire them; but in the end we secretly turn away from them and say, "Give us the world as it is, with all its topsy-turvydoms and inequalities, its squalor and its splendour, its low attainments and steep ideals, its ecstasies and its agonies, as a place to live in."

But what perplexities do we not experience when we turn from life as a picture to life as a court of equity! It is with a strange chill that we encounter the unquestionable fact that this bright and brilliant pattern of human life, with its colours of gold and crimson, derives half its pictorial beauty from the threads of sorrow, disappointment and failure that run through and through it. Recent science has elaborated the fact that the course of history, as well as the splendid upward movement of the organic world, are the fruit of a deadly struggle, in which nearly all the advantage lies with one side and most of the penalty with the other. There is no longer any doubt that the triumphs of evolution in

the plant and animal world, and largely in the human as well, have been purchased at enormous cost. The survival of the fit has been bought at the expense of the unfit. To enable the few to live the many have had to perish. The gorgeous beauty of a butterfly's wing, which delights the eye so much with its symmetry and its wealth of colour, is the relic of incalculable generations of butterflies that have perished while the perfect pattern was being evolved. Nature does not send all her children into the world equally endowed for the battle of life; she does not place them in equally advantageous conditions; she does not seem to care for the interests of the less fortunate as she does for those of the fortunate. Accordingly, the race is to the swift and the battle to the strong; and though by degrees the ascending scale of life is climbed and the world is filled with finer and happier creatures, yet is every step of that stairway slippery with the blood of those which have perished on the way up. The final result is glorious, but the method by which it has been attained seems, at least at first sight, strangely ruthless and coldly cruel.

This problem as it confronts us in the animal world affects us in a somewhat

painful way; but when we see the same inequality facing us in the world of humanity, and consider its tragic results, our faith in the essential goodness of the world receives a still ruder shock. *A priori*, we should infer that a good Creator, who loves His creatures equally, and who holds each soul as a thing of infinite worth, would give every one an exactly similar chance in the contest. Instead of this, we find the same law of less or more, of advantage and disadvantage, in a word, of seeming favouritism, running through the whole of human life, breeding the most painful contrasts of experience among men and women, with corresponding tragedies of disappointment and failure as their inevitable corollary.

II.

Since this is the problem that will occupy us in this little volume, it will be needful to consider this fact of the inequalities of human life and lot a little more in detail.

The more we do so, the clearer I think will be our conviction that it is a fact bedded into the very foundation and

fabric of the world. This is no accident, no chance happening ; it is one of Nature's ineradicable, ubiquitous laws. Those who dream of an ideal social condition in which the manifold differences that distinguish men as regards their endowments, their outward lot and fortune, their ultimate destiny in life, are to be finally and for ever levelled, and in which all are to have an equal share in the good of existence, may be filled with a most worthy and laudable ambition ; but it is certain that they are flying in the face of the constitution of the Universe. Men are not born equal, nor do they fare equally, nor can any artificially arranged equality amongst them be long maintained. You may minimise the evils of inequality, and readjust your estimates of men in view of their wide differences of gift and opportunity, but the *fact* you will never remove. Not for all your inward heats and your outward revolts will you reverse this law ; you must reconstruct the Universe ere you will annul its operation or undo its consequences. In dealing with a fact like this, it is better, therefore, frankly to face it, and find out the meaning of it, than fruitlessly to gird at it.

When we sort the various forms of inequality in human nature and destiny, we find them grouped into four main classes. Two of these relate to what men are in spite of themselves; and two to what they are in virtue of their self-discipline. In other words, there are inequalities which we cannot, and there are inequalities which we can, help. Human life, as we find it, is made up of the resultant of all these "variables." Gifts and opportunities on the objective side, diligence and motive on the subjective side—these are the materials out of which we weave our destiny, and take our place in the moral order of the world.

1. There are, first, *the inequalities of endowment, or gift*, which so widely distinguish men from one another from the cradle to the grave. We come into life dowered with a certain capital of brain-power, of mental and physical capacity, of originality or acquisitive power, and this capital differs incalculably as between one man and another. You can measure the difference in brain-substance between a Shakespeare and a clod-hopper, but can you measure the difference between the genius of the one and the foolishness of the other? There is a common

denominator between the physical stature of a giant and a dwarf, but where is the middle term in the contrast between the intellectual resources of a Newton and of an imbecile? Nature never repeats herself; when she has made a man, great or little, she breaks the mould and starts afresh, and always on another scale. Prospero on the one side, the philosopher whose gifts wield magical influence over Nature and over men, and Caliban on the other, scarce removed from the animal, and therefore impotent except for mischief, represent poles of contrast, and there are men so varied in natural gift as to fill the minutest stages of divergence between these extremes, among whom you will not find any two exactly alike. Even twins differ at birth, and grow more and more unlike as life goes on.

To difference of gift we must add differences of *disposition*. We classify the temperaments into special groups, but these are merely rough averages; you will find that no man is purely sanguine, or melancholic, or phlegmatic, or energetic, but a curious amalgam of each, and a different amalgam every time. Some of us are born with an overplus of high spirits, others of will-power, others

of patience and persistent industry, and some seem defective in most directions. The humorous and the prosy, the light-hearted and the sad, the plodding and the brilliant—they are all here in this parti-coloured world. And this infinite variety in temperamental endowment makes the difference that exists between one man and another, both as to their capacity for happiness, and their possibilities of achievement. Just because he is what he is, one man wins his way to popularity and fortune, to joy and all the graces of life; while just because he is what he is, another man misses all these rewards and benefits.

More puzzling still are the differences we note in *moral* endowment among men. It is idle to deny that one man finds it easier to do, and to be, right, than another, in virtue of a happier heredity and a nature in closer affinity with all that is good. The contrasts between a St. Francis of Assisi and a murderer are not entirely, some would say not mainly, the results of self-discipline; partly at least, they are the fruit of a wide difference in their spiritual endowment. It may be truly said that it is easier for one man to be

a saint, than for another to be morally decent.

2. Here, then, is one line of difference between individual men, and it is one which so far is beyond their control, and for which they have no responsibility. Corresponding to this inner contrast, we note another difference which they cannot help, that of *environment and opportunity*. If we are born with certain inner abilities or disabilities, we are also born into certain advantages or disadvantages. Some infants, as Robert South said long ago, are not so much born as damned into the world. Their surroundings from birth are hopelessly against them; they are pitched into a whirlpool of squalor, vice and premature temptation, out of which they never escape. Others come into the world as into a warm nest, lined with all soft and gentle protections, and sheltered during infancy and youth from most harmful influences. Their powers are educated, their characters disciplined, their souls stimulated into the love of all that is fair and good, till they are able to breast the storms and scour the continents of life with strong and conquering wing for themselves. What wide contrasts of circumstance do we not find in

life! The path of one man shineth more and more unto the perfect day, while another finds his onward journey hampered by endless entanglements of difficulty and misfortune. It is hard for some men to fail in life, so happily do events and opportunities open out before them, so lavishly does Fortune pour her gifts into their lap; it is as hard for others to succeed for contrary reasons.

> Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air;
> Full many a gem of brightest ray serene
> The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear.

There are "mute inglorious Miltons" whose poetry of nature has never taken vocal form for lack of stimulus and education; many a village Cromwell has perished in his first engagement who, if he had lived, might have led armies into victory. Opportunities as well as gifts are scattered with infinite variety among men, and there seems no law by which the right man and the adequate opportunity always come together.

So far the differences we have noted among men are involuntary, such as they cannot help. But there are other differences which come under the scope

of the will and are legitimate matters of choice and moral effort.

3. For instance, there are wide differences in *diligence* and application to be noted between this man and that. All of us do not strive with equal energy after the prizes of life. There are brilliant men who fail for lack of purpose and energy. There are mediocre men who fight their way through hosts of obstacles into usefulness and success. This is not primarily a question of endowment, nor is it a question of opportunity; for there are numbers of men with notable gifts and favouring circumstances who make a wilful wreck of their lives; and there are numbers who are not highly dowered by nature, and who have no favourable winds to waft them on their voyage, who yet reach their goal through all the head-winds of difficulty. It is the discipline through which we put our powers and the watchful energy with which we meet our chances that count here.

4. Finally we arrive at the inward and ultimate difference between one man and another, a difference purely ethical and spiritual, *i.e.*, the disparity between the *motives* that sway men in their outlooks and efforts. Do they work for Self or for

God? Are they guided and swayed by considerations of prudence or of altruism in their struggles and efforts? Do they do right because it is right, or for the sake of the reward it brings? Are they, in a word, selfish or disinterested in their conduct? We must allow that here there is a very wide gulf between one man and another. Our estimate of each other's worth depends in the last resort more on the quality of the motives which govern our ideals and actions than on anything else.

Such are the broad lines of difference that run their sinuous course through the tangled web of human life. Gift and opportunity, diligence and motive —out of these threads we weave our destiny, and take our place in the physical and moral order. What are we to think of these inequalities, some of which lie largely if not altogether beyond our control? Does the seemingly haphazard way in which they befall us suggest that the Universe is built on non-moral and spiritually indifferent lines? We know how men suffer from a sense of the inequality in human powers and lot; we know how they rebel against it; we know how often they doubt God's justice

and goodness because of it. Are these differences real or apparent? Are they a statement of fact or an aberration of vision on our part? If real, is there any law of compensation at work in the Universe which turns the balance and stands over against them as an exact equivalent and makeweight? This is the problem which I would invite the reader to consider. That the difficulty is a real one is patent to every thoughtful reader; the answer is not so clear to many. And yet I am persuaded that in the Gospels we have ample materials for the more or less complete solving of the difficulty.

This solution is to be found in a striking group of our Lord's parables—those that are sometimes entitled the "money-parables," together with the parable so-called of "extra service," which, viewed together, constitute the series dealing with the question of "work and wages in the Kingdom of Heaven." As we consider them in order we shall, I think, realise two things: the clear and unmistakable way in which our Master recognises the existence of a problem to be solved; and, secondly, the equally clear and unmistakable light which he throws upon it. Before we have done with these

parables, it is my hope that we shall find the difficulties surrounding the facts dissolving into thin air, and that we shall experience a fresh realisation of the inherent and Divine justice underlying the perplexing conditions of human life. In the parable of the Talents we are faced with the question of Gifts and their use; in the parable of the Pennies, or the Husbandmen who were hired at various hours of the day, with the question of Opportunity and its reward; in the parable of the Pounds, with the question of Diligence, or the culture of both gift and opportunity; and in the parable of Extra Service with the question of Motive, or the inner standards of conduct. Each of these parables will fairly demand a chapter for its proper treatment. I invite the reader to join in a reverent and open-hearted study of the Master's teaching on these ever-present problems of the religious life, in the hope that they will lose their edge, and that their perplexities will be solved in view of the essential justice of the Divine judgment which will ultimately be passed on us all, according to the way in which we first accept, and then overcome, the disabilities of

our nature and the inequalities of our earthly lot.

I do not know that the essential result of our study of that teaching can be given in a more pregnant manner than in the words of one who was not a believer, but who had great insight into the higher meanings of life—T. H. Huxley—who somewhere puts it thus:—"Practical life is a rule-of-three sum, in which your duty, multiplied into your capacity and divided by your circumstances, gives a fourth term in the proportion—which is your *deserts*."

THE PROBLEM OF ABILITY

"**For it is as when a man, going into another country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability: and he went on his journey. Straightway he that received the five talents went and traded with them, and made other five talents. In like manner he also that received the two gained other two. But he that received the one went away and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them. And he that received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: lo, I have gained other five talents. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. And he also that received the two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: lo, I have gained other two talents. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.**"—MATT. xxv. 14-23.

CHAPTER II.

THE PROBLEM OF ABILITY.

"To each according to his several ability."—MATT. xxv. 15.

THE question whether there are essential limitations to the powers and capacities of men, and whether these limitations vary for each individual, has often exercised the minds of psychologists. The wonderful susceptibility of human nature to stimulus and education suggests at times an almost unlimited elasticity of gift in the average man. Under the inspiration of great minds we are all great, at least for the time. "We are as elastic as the gas of gunpowder, and a sentence in a book or a word dropped in conversation sets free our fancy, and instantly our heads are bathed with galaxies, and our feet tread the floors of the Pit." Shakespeare makes us feel as though we could write plays, Scott that we could weave romances, Kant that we have arrived at the secret of the Universe,

Tennyson that the fairy-land of poesy is our native air. None the less is this a happy illusion. Ever the great lead, and the rest of us can but follow. Genius inspires, talent stimulates, but the average man is but a pensioner on his abler brothers. When, by the help of these high priests of culture we have surpassed what we are capable of thinking and doing in our own right, it comes home to us with a chill that after inspiration and self-discipline have done their utmost for us, invisible but insurmountable walls of limitation remain; that a bound has been set to our possibilities which is there for all, and which is narrow and wide for most of us; and that no man by taking thought can add a cubit to his mental any more than he can to his physical stature.

I.

What it is that determines these congenital differences in power and capacity it is not easy to say. We are often told that heredity has a great deal to do with it. Henry Ward Beecher used to say that the first point a man should be careful about is to "choose the right parents to be born from," or, as Emerson,

in his equally characteristic way, put it, "the gate of gifts closes on us at birth." We can never, as it were, go back into the laboratory of Nature to pick up a deficient or forgotten quality. But when we have spoken the magic word "heredity," have we thrown much light on the mystery? It is but an embroidered cloak behind which we hide our ignorance of the real causes that make the difference between one man and his neighbours. What particular combination of excellences of body and mind in parents produces a man of genius; why in the same family there are such wide ranges of ability; why the eldest, or the youngest, or the seventh child, seems to be often more gifted than the rest, there is no science that can explain, nor does there seem to be the least reliable clue to the understanding of this mysterious law of birth. The mightiest minds often emerge out of the humblest origins; the greatest men and women frequently have commonplace children. Certain psychical experts, like Professor Galton, profess to have come to tentative conclusions on the question; but these are mainly negative in character, and there is no general agreement as to

what they are. We simply do not know how nor why these differences of gift exist. The fact is patent, but its causes are hidden behind an impenetrable curtain.

II.

In view of this fact, two primary duties face us.

The first is to accept ourselves as we are; the second is to do the utmost we can to develop and to use such gifts as we possess. The man who is conscious of possessing more than average powers is not thereby exempt from the task of self-discipline and the call to make the utmost of himself for his own benefit and that of his fellows. The average man, and the man who is consciously handicapped with poor abilities, must not allow themselves to fall into discouragement because they recognise that others are more highly endowed than themselves. The teaching of this parable is that, whatever our ability may be, we are to hold it in trust to the Giver, and to use it to the utmost of our opportunity and power.

Am I not here speaking to a besetting tendency in most of us? Very early in

our school-life we come into sharp contact with the fact that every class of boys or girls is composed of individuals who are unequal in capacity, and that in the contest for supremacy someone is bound to come to the front, and someone else is sure to be left behind. Corresponding to this fact is another—that the gifted are prone to pride and vain-glory, often to indolence, while the ungifted are prone to discouragement and apathy. Usually the prizes of life are a sufficient spur to make those who have exceptional abilities work for them—though not always, for genius and ambition are sometimes inversely related. There are two things that keep back the ungifted section of humanity: a lack of idealism, leading to an ignoble contentment with their limitations; and a sense that, whatever they may do, they cannot hope to shine in comparison with their neighbours. What is the use of trying to do one's best if that best must in the nature of things be so poor?

There is but one remedy for this twofold danger; it is for the gifted and the ungifted alike to look away from all comparative differences among themselves, and to realise their responsibility to their Maker. Let us not pride

ourselves that our powers exceed those of our competitors in the race of life, for God has made us, and not we ourselves, and to Him who gave us all things we owe the debt of our best service; and the greater the gift, the greater the demand. Nor let us grow lax and bitter if we find our powers unequal to the task of shining among our fellows. Our responsibility is not to them, but to Him who gave us such endowments as we have, and He will expect us to do our utmost with what we have, and not according to that which we have not. Let us be sure, as we are taught here, that He will not expect from us what we cannot do, nor blame us if our results are less than those attained by other more gifted men and women; nor will He justify us if because we have a small capital of ability we do not put it to any use at all. The servant cast forth into the outer darkness was not the man who, having two talents, could only make them into four, while another, having five, increased them to ten, but the man who, having one, failed to make it into two. He who gives us tasks "according to our several ability" will only expect results according to our ability; but that He will do with the

meanest as rigorously as with the greatest.

III.

These reflections are particularly timely because at no period in the world's history has the question of gifts taken on a more acute and far-reaching importance than the present.

When we consider the causes that have led to the rapid economic and social progress of the last century, what is it that stands out most prominently? It is the fashion among those who champion the cause of Socialism to claim that all wealth is produced by labour. They point to the indubitable fact that without the man who works with his hands no wealth can possibly be produced. The man who sows the seed, and reaps the harvest; the man who carries the hod, and shapes the stone, and lays brick on brick; the man who makes the engine, and stokes the fire, and turns the helm of the vessel—these are they who are the creators of the world's ever-increasing wealth. The employer, the inventor, the organiser, the master, according to this theory, are often considered almost superfluous figures in the

great social machine. They do not work with their hands, nor bear burdens on their backs, nor earn their living with the sweat of their brow, and therefore they are supposed to have little or nothing to do with the production of wealth.

Without detracting in the least from the honourable and essential place of manual labour as a factor in progress, there is another side to this question. What distinguishes the present era of industrialism is not the increased effort put forth by labour, nor even the number of labourers in the world. There are, for instance, more labourers in the empire of China than in the whole of Europe; yet the civilisation of China is stagnant, and the amount of wealth, and especially its rate of increase per head of the population, is not a fraction of what it is in Europe. Or take this fact. A hundred years ago in England ten millions of people made an income of £140,000,000, or fourteen pounds per head ; to-day the same number can and do produce £350,000,000, or thirty-five pounds per head. Why is it that the productive power of labour has been increased nearly two and a half times in a hundred years?

It is because of the invention of machinery, the discovery of better manufacturing processes, the more efficient co-ordination of the forces of production, greater economy in the expenditure of energy, and that vast process of making nature do for us what till recently had to be done by human muscle, which was the triumph of the nineteenth century to have achieved. Now this difference has not been created by the labourer at all; it has been produced by the thinker, the discoverer, the mechanical genius, the chemist, the electrician, in a word by the men of exceptional ability, who have enabled labour to turn its energies into more fruitful channels. It has indeed come about, in a most paradoxical way, that the century of democracy, as the nineteenth century may undoubtedly be called, is still more truly the century of aristocracy, the aristocracy, that is, not of birth, but of talent. To-day we depend as much as ever in the last resort on skilled and unskilled labourers to do their part in the production of wealth, for clearly we cannot, and never will be able to, do without them; but we depend still more on the man who has insight into nature's laws, who has the gift of turning her

vast and obedient forces to human use, who can co-ordinate the energy of human muscle and brain with these natural forces, and who can organise social and industrial effort with a view of doing easily and rapidly what formerly could only be done with infinite labour of muscle and brain alone. And what is true of industry is true of other forms of human effort in all directions. The more democratic the world becomes as regards the extension of human rights and privileges, the more important becomes the office of the leader, the function of the thinker, the influence of the individual man who has gifts above his fellows. No one can tell what secret of incalculable value for the future of humanity is locked up in the sleeping brain of an infant who was born somewhere ten minutes ago, nor what changes in the social and political world may come about through the unfolding of the undeveloped genius of a little child in the home of someone who is now reading these words. The relation of human ability to the half-understood laws and energies of nature is at present in so unstable an equilibrium that any day may see the announcement of a discovery

in physics or chemistry, or even biology, which in another hundred years may change the face of the globe. The place taken by great men in the story of the past has been wonderful, but it is nothing to what it must be in the future. Initiative, leadership, genius of all kinds—to these we must look more than ever for the possibility and the path of future advancement.

Now it is owing to our instinctive feeling of dependence on ability of every kind that so much honour is shown to it in these days. This is why the social and economic rewards bestowed on men of ability are ever increasing. This is why there is a constant tendency to exalt the name of great men, and to show them an adulation and flattery they have never had before. And this is why, on the other hand, those who are conscious that they have no exceptional ability of any kind are prone to be discouraged and refuse to make the best of themselves; why so many secretly rebel against the limitations imposed on them from which abler men are exempt; and why they tend to fall into the sin of the man of one talent who, because he thought his master was a "hard" man, hid his

talent in the earth and refused to work at all. We ask, "Why should *we* be debarred from the rewards that come so thickly to the man of genius, the inventor, the organiser, and be condemned to a grey, narrow lot, not because we work less than they do, but because they are dowered with powers denied to us, and for which they deserve no more credit than we deserve blame because we have them not?" And so, because we are not as other men, we grow rebellious and hard of heart, and lose all sense of the justice and goodness of the Divine government.

Perhaps there is no sphere in life in which this discouragement becomes so deep as in the religious. The greater our desire to do good, the more heartily we long for the gifts and graces by means of which alone that good can be practically achieved. Here surely, we think, one's natural limitations may be surmounted by the infusion of the spirit of grace and power! And verily it would be difficult to measure the influence of an obscure, mediocre life when thoroughly consecrated to the will of God. None the less it is often borne in on us that limitations do exist even here, that

there are among men varying degrees of sensitiveness to spiritual influence, and a marked difference between one good Christian and another in their power to influence those around them. A halting speech, a painful but ineradicable trick of voice or manner, often stand in the way of a devoted preacher or Christian worker, and while he sees others who possess the incommunicable gift of eloquence swaying great crowds and moving multitudes, he is condemned to a narrow and obscure opportunity because he lacks those subsidiary graces of speech and manner. Is it any wonder that such a man often grows disheartened?

IV.

It is precisely to such a mood as this that the Parable of the Talents is addressed. Our Master takes this fact of human inequality, which has existed always, though its effects have grown more accentuated in modern times, and shows us how to look at it in the light of the principles of the kingdom. Out of the infinite possibilities of life He chooses a particular situation in order to put the case before us. A certain employer of

labour, or capitalist as we should to-day call him, summons his staff of employés to him, and gives them a certain portion of capital to trade with. He knows his men well, and what their capacities are, and so he does not divide the total equally among them, but gives to each "according to his several ability." Here we have gift and opportunity properly married to one another. Evidently each servant is expected to do his best, and when a certain time is gone, their master comes home and reckons with them. When the results are revealed they are found to be as varied as the abilities of those who have achieved them. One has made his five talents into ten, *i.e.*, he has doubled his capital; another has turned his two into four, *i.e.*, again he has doubled them; and the one-talented man, having been embittered by the fact that his gift and opportunity were so small, has done nothing. Now mark the verdict passed on these three men. According to the appreciation men get in this world, they would each be rewarded according to the gross results. Special honour, and place, and power, would be given to the man who had made ten

talents; a lower reward would come to him who had made four; the one-talented man, who had done nothing, would be ignored, and left to sink to his own level. Now, leaving the last outside our consideration for a moment, note the difference in the economics of Jesus from the economics of the "world." He judges here not according to crude outward results, but according to men's ability. The man who has made ten and the man who has made four talents are equally commended; there is no difference in the reward bestowed on them. To each his lord said, "Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful in a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord." And the reason why these men are treated alike, though their achievements are so different, is this: they have both done their best, and accordingly, in the sight of the great Taskmaster, they are equal in moral standing, and deserve an equal place in the great kingdom of truth and grace.

Here, as in a heavenly mirror, we realise how earth's rough judgments of men and their doings are corrected in the spiritual order in view of the vast

inequalities in gift and capacity with which they start in life. From our parable, in other words, we learn these lessons:—The differences in endowment among men are God-appointed. Therefore let all accept their gifts and limitations as they are, whether great or little. They are given us as a trust, to use, not for ourselves, but for Another, whose we are and whom we serve. He will tolerate no neglect, will excuse no subterfuges, will not fail to punish indolence, and bitterness, and inattention to our duties. The man who has least and the man who has most are equally expected to do their best with what they have, and they are expected to do no more. If the one-talented man had made his one gift into two, he would have been on a par with the man who made his five gifts into ten; and if the five-talented man, as not unfrequently happens, had buried his in the earth, he would have been as assuredly sent into the outer darkness as was the other. Hence, as we at once recognise, perfect justice is done to all. This is "righteous judgment."

There are many other lessons incidentally suggested by this beautiful parable, but there is space here for

only two concluding words. Notice that the lord of these servants, having given to each servant "according to his ability," goes into a far country, leaving his employés to their own resources. This is a picturesque way of putting the familiar but all-important fact that in this life all are left free to exercise or neglect whatever gifts they possess. There is no compulsion in the service of the Great King. We are bound to Him by all ties, but we are here to do or to neglect our duty without interference. There is the inward monitor to urge us to the doing of our duty, and to warn us if we neglect it; that is all. How do we act with reference to our God-given faculties and powers? Be they great or be they little, are we making the best of them? Do we use them selfishly for our own immediate advancement or enjoyment, or do we use them for the benefit of others as well, and, above all, to the glory of our Maker? These are simple questions, but they run to the root of life; and according to the answers we shall give to them in the "great day of r koning" will be our place within or without the circle of God's elect in the heavenly kingdom.

Secondly, our course of thought has, we trust, helped towards the correction of a curious anomaly in our judgment of the comparative value of congenital and acquired aptitude. While, ethically, we profess to value the fruits of self-discipline above such qualities as came to us by heredity, yet, in point of fact, it is hard to avoid the opposite feeling. We instinctively admire genius more than saintliness, and envy most in others what they are least responsible for possessing. We even tend to excuse the moral lapses of great men, and to condone their frequent misuse or neglect of transcendent abilities; while the stupidities of the mediocre men, however good they may be, outweigh our admiration of their moral excellencies. Our study of this parable on the other hand proves to us that this tendency is foolish and unjust. We have learnt that in the sight of God, a man possessed of great abilities is not, *per se*, superior to a man of meaner parts; nay, that if the latter possesses more devotion than the former, he will rank higher in the Heavenly order, and receive a nobler reward.

THE PROBLEM OF OPPORTUNITY

"For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a ~~penny~~ a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing in the market-place idle; and to them he said, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing; and he saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard. And when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and pay them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a ~~penny~~. And when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received every man a ~~penny~~. And when they received it, they murmured against the householder, saying, These last have spent but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat. But he answered and said to one of them, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a ~~penny~~? Take up that which is thine, and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? or is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last."—MATT. xx. 1—16.

CHAPTER III.

THE PROBLEM OF OPPORTUNITY.

"It is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee."—MATT. xx. 14.

In calling this the Parable of Opportunity I am aware that I am running counter to the exposition of almost all the great commentators from Origen downwards. There is nothing like unanimity, it is true, in their interpretations, but the explanation most in favour is that given by Dr. A. B. Bruce, who says that the purpose of the parable is to "illustrate the supreme importance in God's sight of motive as a measure of value."* He finds the key to its interpretation in the scene which immediately precedes. There Peter, in view of the supreme sacrifices demanded from the members of the kingdom of heaven, says, "Lo, we have left all, and followed Thee; what then shall we have?"† Jesus in reply pours

* "Parabolic Teaching of Christ," p. 194.
† Matt. xix. 23.

forth an emphatic and generous promise to those who have freely given up all earthly possessions and relationships for the sake of the kingdom, that they will receive "a hundred-fold, and shall inherit eternal life."* Then, it is said, lest this might tend to foster an interested and servile spirit in His followers, He utters this parable, drawing a contrast between those servants who bargained with their employer and those who trusted him to do "what was right" with them, and showing how the latter surpassed the former in the estimation of their master. Such is the accepted rendering of this perplexing parable.

I.

Space forbids an exhaustive statement of the writer's objections to this interpretation, but a few words are necessary in order to clear the ground.

(1) In the first place, the structure of the parable is against it. There is no hint whatever from beginning to end of any difference in spirit between the labourers who "agreed for a penny a day" and those who came into the vine-

* Matt. xix. 29.

yard during the later hours. On the one hand, no suggestion is made that the first batch showed a mercenary spirit in demanding a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, nor does the employer appear to think so; and, on the other hand, no commendation is passed on the others because they made no arrangement regarding the rate of payment they were to receive. (They were clearly not in a position to make such a bargain, as the normal time for hiring labourers was over and gone.) Nor can we urge that there was anything unnatural in the surprise and disappointment of the first set at finding that those hired last received equal payment with themselves, though they had done only one-twelfth the amount of work. This indeed was just what the average man would do. The emphasis of the parable lies in the fact that, with an apparently equal willingness to work on the part of all the labourers, there was a great diversity in the opportunity of service granted to them. Some had the chance of earning a full day's wage; others had varying fortune, down to those who had been idle all the day to the eleventh hour "because no man had hired them." The natural

impression left by the narrative is surely that it presents a vivid and striking picture of the inequality of opportunity which is so marked a feature of human lot.

(2) But the chief interest of the parable, after all, as Dr. Bruce rightly points out, lies not so much in the conduct of the men, as in the character of the employer. "This man is no ordinary employer of labour, by no means the first man of the kind you happen to meet. . . . Such men as he may possibly be found among this world's employers of labour, but they are rare, men like the gifted author of a charming tractate on political economy, which takes its title from a sentence in our parable,* and which has for its burthen that in the business relations of men you cannot without fatal results ignore the social affections, and for its unconscious scope to turn the commercial world into a kingdom of God."† And in what does the uniqueness of this man's character consist? Dr. Bruce finds it in two very unusual traits among employers. First, that he "now and then takes it into his

* "Unto this Last," by John Ruskin.

† "Parabolic Teaching of Christ," p. 188.

head to go at an advanced hour of the day in search of labourers *from benevolent motives*, not for his own advantage, but for the advantage of those who have the misfortune to be unemployed." * This feature indeed is evident from the structure of the narrative. Secondly, "that he seems to attach importance not so much to the work done, as to the spirit in which it is done." † To this statement, however, I beg to demur, as embodying a consideration that is not fairly suggested in any part of the parable. It is true that the employer expresses abhorrence at the grumbling with which those hired first receive their stipulated wage; but that does not necessarily imply that the others are men of a loftier and more disinterested temper. He is simply emphasising his right to do what he likes with his own property, and to show himself kinder than other people expect him to be. It is equally clear that in this instance he is departing not only from the laws governing work and wages in the industrial world, but also from his own custom as an employer. We

* *Op. cit.*, p. 189.
† *Ibid.*, p. 190.

have no right to assume that he was a stranger to the labourers before this day; and if not, the surprise shown by them at the way in which he acted indicates that their former experience of him had not prepared them for the way in which he now treated them. He is acting on this particular occasion in a particular manner for a particular purpose. For one day in his life he will rectify the inequality in the opportunities of men, and deal with them on the basis, not of the bare amount of their work, but of their willingness to make the best of such chances as they happen to get. So he goes out after the usual hour of hiring, and gathers in all he can find who are willing to work, be it only for the last hour of the day. The crucial sentences in the narrative are these:— "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" . . . "Because no man hath hired us." . . . "Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you." . . . "And they . . . received every man a penny."* Our attention is drawn to the fact that none of these belated labourers had been idle from choice; that the householder is anxious to

* Matt. xx. 6, 7, 4, 10.

equalise, as far as he can, their chances; and that he is not going to let any man suffer loss because he has had no opportunity of beginning work earlier in the day. For once in a way, he will take a man's will for the deed, and treat all alike in the way of wages who, if they had been alike in their opportunity of serving him, would with equal willingness have done a full day's work.

It is clear that such an act could not possibly represent a settled habit of conduct on the part of our employer. Such a course would not only mark him out as hopelessly quixotic, but would be disastrous to his own interests, and perilous to the interests of his men. No one could afford to act like this habitually in the labour world without sooner or later bringing ruin on himself and disorganising the labour market for others as well; nor would it have any beneficent effect on the character of the average labourer. But as an exceptional act for an exceptional purpose it would serve admirably to point a moral and illustrate the principle of ideal justice as between one man and another. It is not men's fault for the most part that their chances of service and reward in this life are so

unequal, nor would this, in a world of ideal relations, create any inequality in their rewards. This, it seems to me, is the obvious and beautiful lesson of this parable. It meets all the difficulties of structure and interpretation without creating any fresh difficulties, as all other interpretations seem inevitably to do, and it illustrates perfectly the principle of justice which corrects the diverse and often contrasted chances that come to us in our earthly experience, when viewed in the light of the laws of the Kingdom of God.

II.

Let us consider in closer detail what this inequality of opportunity implies.

That it exists no one can deny. Some men are born "in the purple"; fortune favours them from the beginning to the end of their life, and showers lavish favours into their lap. Others are born in poverty, hedged in by narrowness of circumstance from cradle to grave; the chances that drop so frequently in other men's paths seem to pass them by steadily and uniformly all their days.

This inequality is partly the fruit of natural conditions. The universe, as we

have already had occasion to remind the reader, is not arranged along lines of symmetry, so far at least as our vision of it goes. "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory."* And this "glory" is as much the result of position in the sky as of inherent brightness or dimness. Some of the planets are too near the sun to sustain life; some are too far away. Our earth alone, according to the latest experts in astronomy and physics, is in the fortunate condition of being able to sustain life. So far, the infinitely great. When we examine the infinitely little, we find that of a hundred seeds the vast majority never have the chance to fructify,—they perish as seeds before germinating, however useful they may be as food; and of the others only a very few are placed in sufficiently favourable circumstances to come to their perfect flower and fruit. Some are crowded out by more vigorous competitors; others become the prey of birds and beasts and insects; others fall victims to inclemency of climate or changes of weather. And in the animal

* 1 Cor. xv. 41.

world it is much the same. I cannot pause to remind you how fractional a proportion of creatures born into life have any real chance given them to reach maturity, nor how vast a multitude live a stunted life owing to an environment that is ungenial and unsuited to their condition. But it is in the human world that this disparity between gifts and opportunity becomes most glaring and strikes us with greatest pain.

It is true, as Bishop Phillips Brooks says in one of his sermons, that "everywhere power is seeking opportunity, and fulness is seeking need, throughout the universe of God. The teeming hills send their streams down into the thirsty plains. The winds rush in to fill the vacant fields of space. Knowledge is always trying to widen its field and fill with its abundance some new emptiness of ignorance. The search is mutual, and going on everywhere; it makes the unity of the vast world. The mighty globe is bound together by these cords of power running out in help, and need running out in appeal, all over its surface."

This, I say, is true enough. But it is not all the truth. For not all power and need meet one another in this world.

The power is often here, and the opportunity far away. The adjustment of ability to its "legitimate" chances of activity and development is not, or at least to our vision seems not to be, very close in our earthly life. These two factors are seldom perfectly joined; often they are found far apart. It may be an illusion on their part, and the fruit of deceptive self-esteem, but many men feel that, if they had had other men's chances, they would have done something useful or great. Mark Rutherford writes in one of his suggestive books, "It is surely plain enough to everybody that there are thousands of men and women within a mile of us, apathetic and obscure, who, if an object worthy of them had been presented to them, would have shown themselves capable of enthusiasm and heroism. Whole volumes of human energy are thus apparently annihilated."* It is no answer to this problem when he goes on to say, "But the universe is so wonderful, so intricate, that it is impossible to trace the transformation of the forces, and when they seem to disappear the disappearance may be an illusion. Moreover, waste is a word which is applicable only to finite

* "Clara Hopgood," p. 212.

resources. If the resources are infinite, it has no meaning." I say this is no answer to our perplexity and sense of disappointment at the unequal distribution of life's chances and opportunities, for the problem is real from the human side, however it may be finally equated from the Divine. What we desire to know is in what way the individual is to be judged who fails not through any lassitude or lack of enterprise, but because his opportunity has so far never come to him. For there are men and women who, so far from receiving a chance of a full day's service in the vineyard, seem to be left behind even at the eleventh hour, and get no chance at all.

We know how in the natural order this problem of inequality is solved. The fortunate men are idolised ; they are treated not only as those who have had their opportunity, but often as though they had created it for themselves. And the unfortunate people, those who have capacity and eagerness of spirit, but no chance of showing their mettle and their competence, are despised, and neglected, and visited with disabilities, as though they alone were responsible for their unrealised possibilities.

It is true that a new sense of social justice is struggling to the birth in the industrial world. The old Socialism which was based on the supposed equality of all men, and on their consequent right to an equal share in the products of industry, is practically dead. It flew too clearly in the face of nature to survive for long the stern test of the facts and forces of life. But there is a new Socialism dawning which as an ideal is altogether true and beautiful. It is that which aims at so ordering the mutual relations of men in varying circumstances that they shall have an equal opportunity; *i.e.*, an equal chance of showing what is in them, and, as far as possible, an equivalent share of the rewards of their labour. It is the purpose of the new schemes of education (as far as they are really educational) so to arrange the rewards and chances of able scholars as to enable them to pass on from the elementary schools right through to the university. This, it is true, is only a small department of the great process of equalising human opportunity; but it is a step in the right direction. Other disabilities still remain which it will take many a century of social and political reform to equalise. It is at least a

good thing that such an ideal has been not only conceived by enthusiasts, but acknowledged as being to some small extent within the sphere of practical politics.

Meanwhile the inequality remains; it is a rooted element in the present conditions of civilisation. Some men are at a disadvantage in a thousand ways as compared with other more fortunate individuals, and this owing to no fault of their own. They cannot show what is in them often owing to baffling circumstances; they are held back by disabilities of poverty and of early training. There is a wide lack of correspondence between their gifts and their chance of using those gifts. The chief places in life do not go necessarily to those who most deserve them, but often to those who are incapable of filling them to the best advantage.

Is there any light thrown on this perplexing problem from a higher standpoint? I know of nothing except what is given us in this parable. It tells us that there are other standards of judgment than those in vogue among men of the world. We are fortunately able to apply these standards as revealed to us in our Lord's teaching, and one of these is

expounded beautifully here. From the standpoint of the Kingdom of God, the standpoint of eternity, the crude inequalities of life are trimmed and corrected and put in their place.

Our heavenly Father will judge us not by the results of our labour; will not take the bare outward measurements of our service—so much done, so much left undone, therefore so much reward and payment. He will strike a balance between capacity and opportunity, between the chances offered to us and the use we have made of them; and if with a small chance we have done our best, the man who has done no more than his best with a bigger chance will be rewarded on an equality with us. Each will get his *denarius*, his full day's wage for as much of the day as he has been able to work. There is no respect of persons with Him, and no respect for superior chances. His eye as He judges us is kind as well as just. He will take into account all the difficulties that have hampered us, all the hindrances that have hemmed us in; and will reward us accordingly. God is not a hard taskmaster, but a just and loving Father, who exacts no more than it is possible for us to do and to accomplish.

Two deductions follow from this exposition.

(1) There is no room for complaint or for a sense of injustice in view of these painful contrasts in human opportunity.

I do not mean that these contrasts are illusory, and that, if we knew everybody's life perfectly, we should see that they disappear into a perfect balance. But our parable does suggest unmistakably that they are not fundamental. There are qualifying circumstances probably in every case. Often, certain disadvantages follow the fortunate man, and neutralise some of his privileges. "Every heart knoweth its own bitterness," and many a man envied by his neighbours would possibly be pitied if they knew all. And there are compensations probably in the narrowest and most perverse lots which tend to soften the hard edge of poverty and disability and make them bearable. The outward circumstances of men do not settle everything, nor determine rigidly their possibilities of service and happiness. But we can easily press this idea of compensation too far, as is undoubtedly done by Emerson in his brilliant essay on the subject. It is not in ignoring the facts that we escape

from their legitimate pressure, but by unveiling other and more fundamental facts which mitigate their severity, and help to trim the balance of their unevenness. And in the case before us we are assured that all the outward inequalities of human lot are neutralised by the perfect consideration and just regard of the Great Judge, who in the "day of His power" will readjust according to the strictest law of righteousness all that is ill balanced in the relation of ability and opportunity in this life.

(2) Therefore there is no ground for discouragement on the part of the unfortunate, nor for pride on the part of the privileged. If we look to the estimate formed of our work by the world that now is, we shall find it crude, and often cruel enough to create a bitter revolt against its injustice. But if we look to the laws that govern the spiritual kingdom which we must all ultimately come under, a fresh and exhilarating sense of justice visits our hearts; we are encouraged to do our best with what opportunities we have, and, however narrow these may be, they are broad enough to win the "Well done" from our Father, and the benediction of His appreciative love. *Sursum corda!*

Those, only, who neglect their opportunities, and utterly refuse the call to service will be finally rejected. There is room for imperfect service in the kingdom, for even the grumbling labourers are paid their due wages. But there is no room for sloth, indifference, or wilful neglect of time's fast vanishing chances in the Lord's vineyard. There is no mention made of the idler in this parable, for the lesson does not specifically include him, and our Lord never overloads His canvas. But here, as well as in the other parables, we can imagine a darkness beyond the twilight, and realise the stern judgment that will be passed on him who has refused to make what he can of such chances as come to him. Let us then "work the works of Him that sent us while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work!"

THE PROBLEM OF DILIGENCE

"He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called ten servants of his, and gave them ten pounds, and said unto them, Trade ye herewith till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent an ambassage after him, saying, We will not that this man reign over us. And it came to pass, when he was come back again, having received the kingdom, that he commanded these servants. unto whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading. And the first came before him, saying, Lord, thy pound hath made ten pounds more. And he said unto him, Well done, thou good servant: because thou wast found faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Thy pound, Lord, hath made five pounds. And he said unto him also, Be thou also over five cities."—LUKE xix. 12—20.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PROBLEM OF DILIGENCE.

"And he said unto them, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds." —LUKE xix. 24.

IN our discussion of the "Money Parables," we have seen how some of the perplexing contrasts in human life are resolved and harmonised by the higher standard of judgment revealed in the teaching of Jesus Christ. The Parable of the Talents tells us that differences of gift, so important in the lower industrial order, do not tell in the higher, but that the mediocre man who develops and uses his small gifts to the full is equal to the genius who can do no more than his best with his. The Parable of the Pennies tells us that as regards differences of opportunity also there will be equality of reward in the great day of reckoning between the man who has laboured honestly but for one hour, for lack of an earlier chance, and the man who has had his full day's

opportunity and has used it. We now come to a new order of difference between one man and another, a difference that penetrates deeper into the region of conduct and character, and which has to be dealt with from another standpoint. I refer to the wide contrasts presented by men and women in the devotion, and earnestness, and energy of spirit which they show in the fulfilment of their responsibilities. So far we have taken this element for granted, and have assumed, for the sake of the argument, that every man always does his best. We have now, however, to shift our ground a little, and ignoring all differences of gift and opportunity, consider only those that arise out of the great variety of application and industry which human life presents, and ask how this appears in the sight of our Master, who is also our Judge.

I.

That great and vital differences do exist in the spirit and energy with which men devote themselves to the service of God and of their fellow-men is so clear that we need not dwell long on the

fact itself. Some men throw themselves into their work with a whole-heartedness and a devotion that is beyond praise. They are incandescent with eager energy; they pant and glow with enthusiasm; they do not give themselves any ease, or respite, or breathing-time, so great is their passion for work, their ardour to buy up life's precious and fleeting opportunity. Others go as far as they are led—or pushed. They will do just as much as they are bound to do and no more. So long as they are under the eye of a taskmaster they will work after a fashion; directly they lose the sense of being watched they relax into indolence or carelessness. And there are infinite gradations of industry between these two extremes.

What makes this difference?

(1) It may be said that it is as much due to heredity as any other quality. There are men who are born to be energetic; others, to use a familiar but expressive phrase, are "born tired." Some children are endowed with a constitution as full of nervous force as a galvanic battery is of electricity: any trivial stimulus lets loose floods of extravagant force; yet in the same family

there may be other children who respond to no external incitement and ask for no greater happiness than to be allowed to pursue the even tenor of their way without interference. You cannot keep some people still: if their vitality is not directed into a useful channel, it will break loose in some destructive way; you cannot stir other people to any show of energy at all, nor suggest any motive strong enough to make them animated and busy. And there is a prevailing idea that this is so because men are made so, and that they cannot alter it.

(2) Let us at once allow that there is some weight in this contention, and that it is as useless to expect an equal amount of effort from various individuals as it is to expect equal abilities in other directions. There is a coefficient of energy in all of us, as there is a coefficient of memory or common-sense, and this coefficient is probably limited in each. But while that is true, it is not all the truth. The boundary is fixed, but there is nothing fixed short of the boundary. Energy is another name for *will*; and will is not a fixed, but a variable, quantity. You can exercise it or neglect it; you can direct it this way or that; you can

improve it by use, you can lose it by neglect. The fact is that we all possess a certain store of voluntary energy which is above all things under our own control; and it is this voluntary use of our inner forces which we are studying just now. We are at any rate equal in this, that we are all possessed of a certain amount of will-power; that we can make a full or a negative use of it; and that it depends on ourselves what we shall do with it, and whether we make the best or the worst of it. Our question is not how much energy we naturally possess, but what do we do with so much of it as we have?

When we put the matter thus, we at once recognise that gift, or heredity, does not sum up the case. Our whole system of moral and religious training is based on the assumption that every child in the home, every scholar in the class, can do something, and be something, more than he actually is by nature; that there are latent forces capable of being roused into activity; and that in the last resort it is only the child himself that can determine how much he will learn, and what kind of man he will be. The very word *education* suggests the act of drawing out or *educing*, the possibilities of knowledge,

industry, character, in the pupil; and when we have equipped a child with all the externalities of training, it still remains with himself how far he will rise to his noblest possibilities as a man, and use his resources to the best advantage for himself and others. Religion adds to this the quickening of the latent affinities of the soul, and the reinforcing and flooding of the will with the influences of the unseen world. But underneath and within all forms of training, all kinds of stimulus from around and from above, the pivot and fulcrum of all progress is still *the individual will*. What a man himself determines, and how much he is willing to do, regulates the moral value of his labour in the end.

II.

Now let us turn for a moment to the Parable of the Pounds, which deals with the exact problem before us, and see what light is shed there upon it.

The structure of this parable and many of its phrases are so like those of the Parable of the Talents that many commentators have inclined to the belief

that they are two versions of the same discourse. The general opinion, however, is against that view, and with this general opinion I heartily agree. The similarity of phrase arises out of the kinship of the problems dealt with; but the differences are too obvious and striking to permit any doubt—at least, in my mind—that they were not only uttered, as stated, on different occasions, but that the lessons they are meant to teach, though allied, are quite distinct.

First, we are met with the fact that the two employers of labour treat their servants differently at the outset. In the Parable of the Talents the householder gives various amounts to his servants—"to one five talents, to another two, to another one," "to each according to his several ability," while in the parable before us the nobleman gives to his ten servants the same amount, to each a "pound." The reason is obvious. In the first case, the employer recognises the variety in capacity between one servant and another, and he wisely apportions the capital accordingly, with a view to the best results; in the second, there is no obvious disparity of gift between the employés, and the employer is

testing not their ability, but their devotion to himself and their willingness to work hard for him in his absence.

The second difference is seen in the reward bestowed on the servants who have been found faithful to their trust. In the first case, as we have already seen in studying the Parable of the Talents, the results are *different in amount*, owing to a difference in the gift that has worked for them,—the five talents become ten, and the two become four—but they are *equal in ratio*, the capital being doubled in each instance. Therefore the reward is the same; the man who has turned his five into ten and the man who has turned his two into four are treated exactly alike. In the case before us, there is the same disparity in the results so far as amount is concerned: one man has gained ten pounds in addition to his one; another has gained five pounds. But the ratio as well as the amount is here different: in one case one pound is multiplied tenfold, the other fivefold. That is to say, there has clearly been a difference in the energy and devotion of the two men. While both have done well, one has done better than the other. And so we find that, with a

fine and discriminate sense of justice, the reward is varied in exact proportion to the service. To the one whose pound has made ten pounds the nobleman says, "Well done, good and faithful servant: because thou wast found faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities"; to the one whose pound has made other five pounds he says, "Be thou also over five cities." And when he pronounces the sentence of the servant who had neglected to do anything at all, he adds, "Take away from him the pound, and *give it to him that hath the ten pounds*," suggesting still more clearly the higher virtue and larger deserts of the man who had done so much better than the others.

Is there not revealed here the very acme and perfection of true, discriminating, even-handed justice? While equal devotion with different gifts or different opportunities is rightly to be considered equal in moral value (however differently it may be judged from the lower, industrial point of view), and therefore worthy of an equal reward, is it not also clear that equal abilities used with greater or less devotion should be rewarded differently? These are the

standards of judgment in the Kingdom of God; these are the principles on which work and wages are equated in the spiritual order to which we belong as believers in Jesus Christ; and they fulfil to the utmost nicety His own wise counsel to us, "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John vii. 24).

III.

Let me now turn back to the general question, and press upon the reader the urgent importance of rightly using his energies in this life with a view to the highest and best results, both as regards service and influence, in whatever occupation or lot he may find himself.

There are two directions in which we are called to put forth our energies in the name of our Master. As regards our gifts and powers, we are to develop them to their limits; as regards our opportunities, we are to use them to the utmost. Self-discipline on the one side and watchful devotion on the other—these are the virtues that count for most in a servant of God; and to these we are called by the holiest, the kindest, and

the most imperial voice that has spoken to human ears.

(1) "Self-discipline." Here is a word mainly to the young and vigorous, who are facing life with fresh and eager eyes. What a large and pregnant word it is, yet how hard a task it suggests! Without the training it implies how useless the highest powers, how mischievous and perilous the noblest gifts! The worst calamities that have befallen mankind are the result of great powers foolishly thrown away on useless or evil ambitions; the greatest failures among men have been those who, with splendid endowments, have squandered the capital of ability and influence bestowed on them by a bountiful Providence on self-indulgent, pleasure-loving ends. Truly did Goethe, himself in earlier life a victim to a self-centred and riotous use of immense gifts, say in his later years, "Life begins with renunciation"; and he might have gone on to say that this is so because renunciation—*i.e.*, self-discipline—in the end leads us, among other blessings, to the truest self-realisation.

On the other hand, what splendid results have often been realised even by men of mediocre endowments, who have

set themselves to school, and exercise, and bend to the highest ends, such powers as they have received! The great initial movements of the world's progress are due to men of noble genius —statesmen, prophets, poets, reformers; but the practical work of the world has been accomplished by those who, following in the wake of these pioneers and filled with their inspiration, have patiently given themselves to turn these inspirations to some tangible, beneficent use. Not all of us have been granted the five or even the two *talents;* but we have all received our *pound*, and can trade with it more or less according to the sense of duty and devotion that fills us. Prepare yourselves, young men and women, for the duties and chances that lie ahead of you, waiting your recognition and use, by exercising yourselves unto godliness. Become spiritual as well as physical gymnasts; develop "those wrestling thews that throw the world," those patiently disciplined powers which lead and control men into ways of wisdom and paths of right, those gifts and graces which are the crown and bloom of character. Your reward will be an ordered and harmonious nature

within, and a sure opening sooner or later to do some noble and enduring work.

(2) "Watchful devotion." Here is a word that specially applies to the man of mature powers. Life is made up of gifts and opportunities; and these are made the one for the other as the finger for the glove, as the channel for the stream. Having disciplined our faculties, our next duty is to wait and watch for our opportunities.

We all know full well in these days of keen competition as regards all coveted positions in this life what an essential quality this of watchful readiness is. We know that unless a man is ready for his chance when it comes, unless he has prepared himself to seize and use it, it shall not avail him even though it drops into his lap like ripe fruit. And we know that however ready in equipment we may be, unless we are also watchful, and alert, and eager, our chance shall not avail for us, for it will be gone before we are aware. Many fail in life because they have neglected the years of silent preparation for their "call"; but there are also many who fail because they have not been

alert and ready at the moment when it comes.

"A thousand years a poor man sat
Outside the gate of Paradise;
Then, while he took a little nap,
It oped and shut. Ah, was he wise?"

To this call for readiness most of us listen with more or less intentness as regards our earthly chances. What is strange is that so many do not recognise it to be just as insistent in the life of higher service. The kingdom of God calls for the "business faculty" as much as any of the kingdoms of this world; and the business faculty means watchfulness, ready resource, the genius for an opportunity followed by its swift and adequate use. For there too opportunity does not tarry; there too it is true that—

"There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of our life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

Our Lord's discourses are full of insistent warnings and high incitements to spiritual watchfulness. There is no duty, no task, no virtue, no quality, so impressively and so frequently laid on the minds of His disciples as this. His training

may be called in effect a training in *readiness* for all that God may send us, or that He may call us to bear or do. We have seen how in these parables of the talents, the pounds, and the pennies it is clearly implied; in the parables of the virgins, the rich fool, the householder, the porter at the gate, it is the central lesson; and there are many isolated but emphatic passages here and there where it is the burden of a momentary warning. And if He who "knew what was in man," and had sounded the depths of time and eternity in all their bearings on human character and destiny, was in such perpetual anxiety to drive home this supreme working formula of life, we may be sure that the quality of alertness and watchful industry lies at the basis of all true service and of every large and rounded character.

Our Lord Himself, too, was the perfect embodiment of this virtue. His whole life may be summed up as the fulfilment of the great motto which He adopted as His own, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." We find Him ever subjecting His soul to the discipline of prayer and of communion with His Father; and He was perpetually turning the ordinary events and openings of life into splendid

opportunities for kindly deeds, and inspiring words, and ennobling influence. Those three and a half glorious years of His public ministry are truly a Divine object lesson of what can be done with time and opportunity when used by One absolutely devoted to the Divine will, and entirely consecrated to holy ends. He was always impelled by a sense of solemn urgency, and while there was never a trace of hurry, there was never the least loss of self-possession. He felt the brevity of His chances, and the far-reaching possibilities of every hour. "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day," was His perpetual thought, "for the night cometh, when no man can work."

Do we hear the same solemn urgent voice, calling on us to make the best of our brief earthly day? Are we filled with a sense of the pregnancy of time, of its swift and inevitable flow, of its splendid but brief opportunity in which to become something and in which to do something that will leave the world a little better because we have lived, and that will equip us for a higher service in the great Hereafter? For—and let this parable impress this well upon us—our

place in the heavenly order will depend on the use we have made of our choices and chances here and now. There will be grades and orders of service in heaven, as on earth; we shall not start there on a dead level. To one there will be given as it were ten cities, to another five, to rule; and what will determine that is the way in which we have done our part in our place and lot on earth. Not according to the brilliancy of our gifts nor the largeness of our opportunity shall we take our rank in the Beyond, but according to the greatness of our devotion and the simplicity and simple earnestness of our spirit. "She hath done what she could," was the highest compliment passed by Jesus on any of His friends on earth; and in saying that He revealed the principle by which the honours and hierarchies of heaven will be determined. Let us so serve Him day and night in His temple here, that we may earn the promotion which is the highest ambition of a Christian man who, having done his best for his Master here, dies with the prayer on his lips—

> "And I will ask for no reward
> Except to serve Thee still."

These thoughts help to quicken expectation as well as to awake apprehension in view of the life beyond. The idea of Heaven as a place of monotonous rest, and eternal inactivity, has ceased to have any attraction for us. And this parable entitles us to think of it as a state of holy activity which will have endless possibilities and gradations of service. We shall rest from the sense of toil and weariness which are the penalty of our earthly mortality and sinfulness; but we shall not ask to rest from the Lord's work. Perhaps, on the other hand, the worst doom we can imagine for the idle and the neglectful here is to be condemned to idleness hereafter, and to be debarred from the privilege of serving their Lord whom they have dishonoured by refusing His yoke and rejecting His call. The highest honour of Heaven will be to be promoted to the highest service.

THE PROBLEM OF MOTIVE

"*But who is there of you, having a servant plowing or keeping sheep, that will say unto him, when he is come in from the field, Come straightway and sit down to meat; and will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank the servant because he did the things that were commanded? Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do.*"—LUKE xvii. 7—10.

CHAPTER V.

THE PROBLEM OF MOTIVE.

"Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do."—LUKE xvii. 10.

WHEN we pass from the bright and exhilarating teaching of the Money Parables, with their sure promise of just and abundant reward for all service heartily and worthily done in the kingdom of God, and read this very remarkable and puzzling passage, we are struck with a sense of chilling contrast. The employers in the discourses of the talents, the pounds, and the pennies, are all men who believe in rendering a just recompense to every man that works for them. Those who served them were well paid for their exertions; and they were all paid in strict accordance with their deservings. They illustrate that principle of even-handed justice and consideration which all true servants of

God shall receive at the hands of their Lord. In a world like this, where rewards so often go astray, and where those who deserve least so often get most, there is unbounded comfort and inspiration in this presentation of the just and inevitable law of work and wages in the heavenly order.

I.

In face of this passage, however, we seem to be suddenly thrown back into something worse than perplexity. Our Master is represented no longer in the character of a just and generous employer, but in the guise of a pitiless taskmaster, nay, of a slave-driver, who, having had a full day's work out of his poor human chattels, callously ignores their toil and their weariness, and calls for extra service at the day's close, as though they had been idling all the time, and who gives neither wages nor thanks for all this further labour. The parable, considered as a piece of contemporary economics, throws a lurid light on the pitiless lot of a slave in those hard and brutal days. What a fate for a human being—to spend the whole day in toilsome labour for no

reward save bare subsistence, and then to be forced to curtail the precious hours of rest in order to minister to the selfish needs of an ungrateful and exacting owner, and all for nothing! Is this the kind of master our God is to those who would serve Him day and night, and who, having done all, are still called upon to say, "We are unprofitable slaves; we have done that which it was our duty to do"?

Two remarks are suggested by the situation thus vividly put before us.

(1) First, we see how foolish and wrong it is to take single parables or utterances in the teaching of Jesus Christ as though they fully and by themselves illustrated any great truth. The heart and core of the Gospel is not to be reached by bringing isolated proof-texts to bear on the problems of life, or on the relation between man and his Maker. That has been the fault of a certain type of theologians all through the centuries. They have built their systems, like inverted pyramids, on their apex, by making this or that verse or passage the foundation of all their teaching. In this way they have been able to prove anything they like to their own satisfaction, and

nothing at all to the satisfaction of anyone else. That was not the method of the Master in teaching His disciples. His plan was to present the truth in flashes, to drive home one great lesson at a time as His hearers were able to bear it, gradually building up a symmetrical sphere of doctrine by adding portion to portion till at last it stood forth rounded and full-orbed. We shall get at His full mind, therefore, on any great question, not by pressing home a single verse or parable like this, but by considering it in full view of all the other passages that bear on the question.

(2) So much generally. My second remark is that we shall find the balance of ideas suggested by this parable restored by bringing it into relation with those already dealt with in these chapters. In all of them it is taught most clearly that no man will be allowed to serve God for nought. Whenever anyone performs an act of true obedience to the Divine will, or spends himself in loyal and hearty service in the cause of God—and remember, service to God is rendered through the service of man—he will find in the end that it will be appreciated or rewarded fully and justly by

his Master, who is also his Judge. This is a promise He often made to His disciples. It is true He never promised them a bed of roses. One day, "Peter began to say unto Him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed Thee. Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sister, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for My sake, and for the Gospel's sake, but he shall receive a hundredfold in this life, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." * That is to say, here the reward, great as it is, will be intermingled with drops of bitterness, and many a sorrow and disappointment; only in the great Hereafter, when all earth's disabilities will be left behind, will the reward be complete. None the less will that reward be safe and full and final. And this promise is repeated, as we know, in many a bright and beautiful passage in the Gospels. It was evidently a cherished thought, often dwelt upon by our Lord, because it gave Him a pure and holy pleasure to do so.

* Mark x. 28—30.

II.

But there is one possible result of this principle of reward in the heavenly order which is not so desirable; and that is the bad effect it may have on the minds of those who are at work in the Lord's vineyard. Only the highest incentives are permissible in His service. He who works for a reward, or who allows the thought of reward to bulk largely in his mind as he looks up for heavenly direction, or bends down to lowly tasks for the Great Master, is no true and worthy servant of His. The only motives that are permissible here are love and loyalty. Self-seeking is out of court even though it may come in the most elevated and seemingly disinterested form. Comte's taunt against Christianity would otherwise be indeed true when he speaks of its radical selfishness "corrupting the heart by an immense cupidity, and degrading the character by a servile terror."* And we know that there is a type of Christianity of which this is true. The fear of hell and the love of heaven have too often

* Quoted in Martineau's "Types of Ethical Theory," i., p. 423.

been the operative motives among those who think they are true followers of Jesus Christ. Men have been good, or at least they have done good, and seemed good, for the sake of some extraneous advantage. At its worst this is the root of all hypocrisy; at its best it is but a travesty of true religion. Rightly indeed has this tendency been denounced and satirised by the critics of the faith, and rightly shall we all repudiate it as an insult both to God and His true children. He who avoids evil simply because of its consequences, and does good because of its reward, is but a camp-follower, and not a true soldier of the Cross.

None the less the danger is real lest we fall into this subtle temptation, and the danger is all the more real because of these glowing parables of service, in which the reward and the work are so nicely and justly balanced. And so we find this parable taking its place among the discourses of Jesus Christ, the sole object of which is the uplifting and purifying of our motives in serving Him.

III.

Jesus, as usual, takes an illustration from the life around Him. This time

it is from the slave-holding class, in which the master has the full and absolute ownership of the slave. The hired servant has rights; the slave has none. The servant can demand his wages, so much money for so much work; the slave has no economic standing, his very life being at his master's disposal. The servant, having fulfilled the hours of his agreement, has his evening of leisure, during which he is his own master; the slave, having done a full day's work, is as much as ever at the disposal of his owner, and if he is told to do this or that in addition to the service already rendered, there is no remedy for him: he must just go and do it. If his master is hard and cruel to him, he has no ground for grumbling; if he is kind and indulgent, he has no claim to expect it. The rights here are all on one side, the toil and weariness and unrequited effort on the other. "Doth he thank the slave because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not." Gratitude and reward are not in the bargain between the slave and his owner.

"Even so ye also"—these are the emphatic words of this parable. That

is to say, the point here is not how God will act towards us, but how we are to feel towards God. However good He may be, and kind, and generous in His treatment of us, we have no right to expect it; for we belong to Him night and day, body and soul. He has a right to demand from us, not a part of our time, our energy, our powers, but all we are and all we can do, as our reasonable and bounden service. Besides all this we have been "bought with a price," the price of the Saviour's sacrifice. Thus we are God's by the double right of creation and redemption. And so if He deals with us not as servants, but as sons, and takes us into His family as it were by adoption, it would ill become us to demand by right what comes to us only by grace and good-will. Whatever we may do for Him, we cannot pay our debt to Him; we cannot work ourselves out of our obligation to His holy demands; we can never say, "There, I have done more than was due from me!" "Even so ye, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do."

IV.

Is this a hard and unreal view of our relation to our Maker and Redeemer?

On the contrary, I put it to the reader whether it is not exactly in accordance with the testimony of that imperious voice within us which we call *conscience*—that "stern daughter of the voice of God." It is one of the puzzling but unquestionable attributes of conscience that it knows no moment of pause or remission in the assertion of its claims. There is not a department of our life in which it does not rule; there is never a moment of time during which we are free from its authority. We often silence its whispers; we often shirk its commands; we often excuse ourselves for neglecting its injunctions; but it never fails to enforce its inalienable rights. The penalty is that when we fail to meet its behests, whether it be through thoughtlessness or open rebellion, we have but to think for a moment to find ourselves arraigned before its invisible tribunal, and to find ourselves accused and condemned for disloyalty. We may indeed work out our debt of responsibility to this man and that; we may do more than our duty,

in a sense, to individuals around us, for our responsibility to them is limited: but when we turn our eye upwards, and consider our responsibility to Him who has put this witness of the absolute law of right within us, our pleadings die into shamed silence, and we are dumb.

> "For merit lives from man to man,
> And not from man, O God, to Thee."

Is this imperious and insatiable feature of conscience a sign of morbid and over-developed feeling? On the contrary, it is most clearly heard by those who have risen highest in the scale of goodness. The more eagerly we cultivate our moral sense, the clearer and the more unmistakable does its voice peal forth, and the more absolute is its sway felt to be. The man of easy conscience is not the saint, but the worldling, who purchases immunity from its stings (for a time) by ignoring its lofty demands, and lowering its august standards to suit his mean conception of life. But let the most conscienceless man be suddenly awakened, and in an instant the barriers of self-righteousness fall to the ground like the walls of Jericho at the sound of a trumpet blast, and he feels his soul

laid bare to the clutch of avenging furies. This is the true Sinai of the soul, the mountain that may not be touched by an outraging hand but its cloudy summit flashes forth its scorching fires of accusation, and its base trembles with reverberating thunders of remorse.

Or let us approach the same truth from another side. Have you not observed that those who do their duty most perfectly are ever most ready to meet the voice of human praise and commendation with instant demurral? Why is moral self-complacency a sure sign of an unawakened or a degenerate soul? If we praise a good man, he instinctively and at once disclaims all merit; and if when a man is commended he receives it as only his due, does he not at once lose caste in our eyes? The reason is that a pure and lofty nature is too well aware of its shortcomings to be comfortable under the most genuine admiration. At once a vision of the ineffable goodness rises before him, and he is constrained to say, "I am an unprofitable servant: I owe more than I can ever pay"; while the mean man, heedless of his higher debt, is only too ready to think he has paid it.

Now this parable is Christ's sign and seal that this inner testimony to the absolute law of obligation is no foolish and morbid fancy, but a genuine and authoritative witness to an eternal fact. We can never do more than right; we can never be more than good. Nay, however good we are, there is ever a better; however holy, there is always a holier; however pure and loving, there is One purer and more loving, who is the perfect reality of which we at our best are but weak and wavering shadows. Compared to the ideal goodness, human goodness is like what mathematicians call an "asymptotic line," which is one that lies alongside a perfect curve, ever approaching it, but never able to touch it. That is why the demands of conscience are never fully satisfied; its ideal is infinitely near, yet always infinitely distant, producing that splendid torment in the soul which the ideal awakens, ever stinging it to an impossible endeavour, yet always accusing it of failing in its effort to reach it. "Even so ye, when ye have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable bondservants," slaves to a perfectness we can never compass, debtors to a law we can never fulfil.

V.

I think we are now in a position to co-ordinate this parable with those which we have hitherto been studying. We can see that no culture of gifts, no use of opportunities, no triumph of diligence, can possibly entitle us to the rewards of the kingdom. The truest symbol of the Christian is not the merchant bargaining in the market-place—"this for so much," nor is it the hired labourer agreeing for a penny a day and earning it, but the physician who, returning home after a long day, and hearing of some-one who still needs help and succour, leaves his untasted meal and well-earned rest, and goes forth to do extra service through the stormy night; or the wearied soldier who, after a heavy march, meekly obeys the order to do outpost duty during the long hours of darkness. This is the heroic spirit demanded of the servants of the Most High, a loving, disinterested spirit, loyal and true, that can never do too much, nor satisfy itself that it can do enough.

Once this condition of disinterested service is secured and safeguarded, a new and beautiful light falls on the

promised rewards of the kingdom of God. We can see now that they are never bargains struck between equals, but gracious and kindly encouragements to do our best in the service of the royal and righteous Master. However we may feel called upon to acknowledge a boundless sense of responsibility to God as our Maker and a call for endless gratitude to Him as our Saviour, He will not deal with us as with hirelings or slaves, but as members of a privileged circle of love and service. Once we are received by grace into His kingdom, He gives us a title to its full privileges. Our work will be judged both as regards its quality and its amount according to principles of self-evident and ideal justice. Looking at life from below, it seems like a jumble of lawless forces; merit and reward appear unevenly related, or not related at all; opportunities come and go in a haphazard manner; there is no clear principle of spiritual recompense visible. But looking at the same facts from above, they all fall into rank and order, for the compensating principle comes into view. The Greek conception of the ideal justice was of a blind deity who made no distinctions; the Christian conception is of a

Judge whose eyes "run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in the behalf of him whose heart is perfect toward Him."* The only condition which He demands from those who serve Him is that they should do so from a disinterested spirit, and with a single eye, not to the reward, but to His approval. Then the reward will come in fullest measure and with finest discrimination.

The apostle Paul presents us with an embodiment of the spirit inculcated in this parable that is as nearly perfect as human nature is capable of producing. He was keenly sensible of the boundless responsibility that lay on him as one of the Lord's apostles. There are four words which he is fond of using in describing his relation to his Lord and Master. First, he calls himself the "prisoner of the Lord," a prisoner, *i.e.*, not merely in behalf of Christ, but *made a prisoner by Christ*, so that he belongs to Him body and soul, and has no rights other than a military captive would have from his captor in those lawless days.†

* 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

† Eph. iii. 1; Philemon 9; 2 Tim. i. 8. See on these passages Meyer's Commentary *in loco*.

Elsewhere he rejoices to call himself the *slave* or *bondservant* of Christ, where the idea of unbounded service again enters,* and by which he expresses his feeling that no amount of energy and diligence in that service will ever discharge his indebtedness to his Master. Again, he is the *ambassador* of Christ,† representing Him, but bound by the terms of the relationship to utterly sink his own individuality in his august message. And once more, he is the *steward* or *minister* of Christ,‡ whose first and most vital function is that he should be found "faithful" in the discharge of his duties. These pregnant words all emphasise St. Paul's deep sense of his endless indebtedness to his Master, which impels him by a Divine constraint to serve Him day and night without stint or measure. Yet is the spirit shown by this noble Christian anything but slavish. Rather when we remember his attitude of willing service, his unbounded delight in the work which he did for Christ and His Church, and his sense of inefficiency in

* Rom. i. 1, Gal. i. 10, and other places.
† 2 Cor. v. 20.
‡ 1 Cor. iv. 1.

view of all his attainments,* Bruce's words rise to the mind, "It is true of slaves that they are unprofitable, but it is not true of them that they confess themselves to be so. . . . It is only the free man who makes such a confession, and in the very act of making it proclaims himself to be free."†

This, however, is only half the truth as regards St. Paul's feeling towards his heavenly Lord and His service. Throughout his epistles, alongside of this complete elimination of his personal claims, there is a joyous and lively sense of a great and blessed reward which will be his when his day's work on earth is done. Sometimes it comes home to him as a happy assurance that nothing done in his Master's name can come to nought or be lost in the abyss of abortive efforts. Those who are "steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," will find that their "labour is not in vain in the Lord"‡; those who sow shall reap "if they faint not."§ At other times it takes on a more definite

* *Cf.* 1 Cor. xv. 9.
† "The Parabolic Teaching of Christ," p. 176.
‡ 1 Cor. xv. 38.
§ Gal. vi. 9.

realisation of a generous payment for loyal and honourable service.* But, above all, there are here and there happy references to the garland or "crown of rejoicing" laid up for him in the heavenly life as a reward for his hard work and patiently borne sufferings in this life.† This God will give out of the fulness of His love and grace to him as a faithful servant, and to "all them that also love His appearing." And in this artless and unconstrained combination of humility and expectancy the Christian attitude is beautifully typified. There is an impossible self-effacement suggested in John Ruskin's dictum that we cannot do our duty perfectly till we are prepared to do it whether there be a Father in heaven to appreciate and reward it or not, and to this the New Testament is a stranger; there is, on the other hand, a mercenary contemplation of promised reward which it clearly and emphatically denounces. But everywhere there is an implied promise that he who simply and earnestly does his duty in a free and loyal spirit will at last be joyfully

* 2 Tim. ii. 6; *cf.* 1 Tim. v. 18, and 1 Cor. ix. 25.

† 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8; *cf.* Phil. iii. 14.

received into the heavenly mansions, where he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied in the fellowship of just men made perfect, and of the Master Himself, who also "endured the cross, despising the shame, for the joy that was set before Him." Thus is the perfect balance kept between the spirit of disinterested service and the certainty of righteous reward.

SOME FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth."—MATT. vi. 9, 10.

"All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth."—MATT. xxviii. 18.

"In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another; in honour preferring one another; in diligence not slothful; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord."—ROM. xii. 10, 11.

CHAPTER VI.

SOME FINAL CONSIDERATIONS.

"The kingdom of God is in the midst of you."
—LUKE xvii. 20 (R.V. margin).

THE argument developed in this survey of the "Economics of Jesus" is now fairly complete, but there are two or three subsidiary but practically important questions that call for a brief notice.

I.

What is the relation of the kingdom of God to the actual world in which we live? Is it one (1) of independence and detachment, or (2) of antagonism and contradiction, or (3) of interpenetration?

This is no abstract question, but one that vitally affects our attitude towards life's practical duties and problems.

(1) It may be held that the "natural" and "spiritual" orders of existence occupy different planes of activity, between

which there is no possible point of contact. There is much in the exposition of the principles of the kingdom as given in the Gospels that would suggest this view.* Jesus Himself took no part in the political life of His day; He made no attempt to introduce social or economic reforms into the industrial world; He resolutely declined to interfere in personal disputes†; and He resisted every effort made by His followers to make Him a Ruler or King.‡ The apostles followed Him in accepting the political and social life of the Roman empire as it was; they counselled obedience and submission for conscience' sake to the powers that were§; and while they would occasionally demand a recognition of their legal and civil status, they did so only when their opportunity of following out their chosen task of preaching the Gospel was being unlawfully interfered with by hostile authorities bent on a tyrannical suppression of the new faith.‖

(2) Or it may be affirmed that the

* John xviii. 36; *cf.* Matt. xxii. 21.
† Luke xii. 14.
‡ John vi. 15.
§ Titus iii. 1; Rom. xiii. 1; 1 Peter ii. 12.
‖ Acts xxv. 11, xxviii. 19; *cf.* Acts xxii. 25—30.

"kingdom of this world" and the heavenly order revealed by Jesus Christ are in hopeless antagonism, and that the latter can come to its own only by the total suppression or conquest of the former. In favour of this hypothesis, it may be pointed out that many sayings of our Lord seem consistent with it. The antithesis which is drawn by Him between the "world" and His "kingdom" is sharp and impressive, especially in the Johannine discourses,* and here again he is followed with no faltering tongue by the first Apostles, and especially by St. Paul.†

(3) A deeper consideration, however, will show that both these theories must be set aside in favour of the third. Our Lord preached the Gospel of the kingdom in the world that the world might thereby be "saved;" *i.e.*, that it might be permeated, and leavened, and transformed by the spiritual forces let loose into it. His purpose in coming was not revolutionary, but evolutionary; in other words, He came not to cast down, but to build up, not to destroy, but to fulfil. The theory that the Christian life is one that is to be

* John viii. 23; xix. 25, 31; xiv. 30; xviii. 36.
† Rom. xi 2, etc.

lived apart from the secular life has always proved the parent of serious and painful abuses, leading either, on the one hand, to a separation of the Christian community from the rest of mankind, so making it impotent for good, or, on the other, to a schism in the individual life itself, which is the root of all hypocrisies. The only valid and practical theory of spiritual progress is based on the assumption that while the actual secular course of the world follows ideals and obeys forces that are inconsistent with the principles of the kingdom, yet the only hope of the world is that it may be slowly but surely permeated with the ideals of the kingdom of God, and become finally obedient to its spiritual laws. The higher laws of that kingdom are those which should regulate human society here and now, and though under actual conditions they cannot be fully realised, but would, if abruptly applied, probably lead rather to misery and disorder than to progress, yet is their gradual realisation the great aim and hope of all spiritual effort. The first impact of those lofty ideals on the corrupt society of the Roman empire was necessarily hostile and uncompromising, and it would not

unnaturally give rise to the feeling that the two orders of life—the spiritual and the actual—were in hopeless antagonism. The only possible attitude of Jesus and His apostles towards the established order was at best one of aloofness and neutrality, for it could not be successfully attacked, much less remedied, till the principles of the kingdom had rooted themselves far and wide in individual lives, and so furnished the social leverage necessary before any collective reformation was practicable or even conceivable. That does not mean that this attitude must permanently regulate the minds of Christians in their secular relationships. It has lasted indeed far too long, and is mainly responsible for the painfully slow progress of Christianity in the world. If the Church had realised her social function as the instrument of our Lord to carry out in the collective life the principles she has faithfully enough proclaimed in the individual life, human society to-day would not be governed by such a painfully contradictory set of forces, and it would not be so hard for the individual Christian to fulfil his social functions in perfect obedience to the laws and principles of the kingdom of God.

II.

This brings us to the second question that remains to be discussed: how far the principle of work and wages expounded in this book is applicable to the social conditions of our day. Are the economics of Jesus practicable as industrial laws?

Let us frankly allow that, under the limited conditions of our earthly life, they will probably never—at least in one sense—be more than partially applicable. For instance, in the very nature of the case, material wealth must be estimated by quantitative standards. And if the phrase "industrial reward" must always mean so much money—or what money represents, which is material comfort—then, *ex hypothesi*, the amount of a man's wages, being his rightful share of the wealth he helps to create, must bear a more or less exact relation to the industrial (quantitative) value of his work. Thus no earthly employer, whether he be an individual or the community, can afford to pay to the weak and inefficient workman as much as is given to the able-bodied and capable workman. The weak man may do his best, but he cannot create so much

wealth as the "efficient" man; he is therefore not entitled, on the bare ground of economic justice, to the same wage, and if he is himself filled with an adequate sense of justice he will not expect it. The same is true as regards opportunity. Whether the ideals of the new Socialism referred to already* are likely to become so operative in the future as to do away with the outstanding inequalities that now run so deep, and cause so much economic waste and discontent, it is scarcely possible to conceive so balanced an order of society that all the resultant disadvantages shall be removed; there will probably always be a residuum of injustice in this direction left to be compensated in some other way. As regards the third "variable," the element of diligence and earnest application, the case is clearer, because the diligent man palpably creates more wealth than the idle and the careless. He will be increasingly able in the future to demand a more adequate share of the results of his social and industrial effort. It is difficult however in any scheme of social organisation to see how in the mundane order, which must always deal with outward

* P. 61.

results as the basis of its theory of work and wages, the loftiness or the selfishness of a man's personal motives will ever be capable of measurement, nor how they can be taken into account in the estimation of his economic service. Here only the all-wise Judge is in a position to place us in our true order of merit. A rough guess, always haphazard and often mistaken, is all we are able to make of the incentives and ideals that regulate other people in their earthly activities.

It would thus seem as though the very conditions of our mundane life preclude the just and complete estimate of spiritual values, and suggest that the laws of the heavenly kingdom can never be fully followed and realised in the social order of this world. In so far as this is true, we are merely stating a very evident fact —that the ideal of heaven can never be fully realised on earth. That this should be so is indeed a part of our discipline and education in life. If service and reward were here and now always perfectly equated, this world would not be so useful a sphere of probation as it is at present. We are trained in the principles of disinterested service, purified from selfishness and unworthy motives, and made

fit for the heavenly life, by the very inequalities and disabilities against which we gird so readily, and which are felt to be so engrained an element of injustice in the earthly order as at present constituted. As such they should be regarded in the light of a high opportunity rather than of a hopeless disability.

This, however, does not sum up the situation fully. Our spiritual and social discipline is perfected not only by bearing nobly the ills we cannot remove, but by working hard to overcome such ills as are remediable. And however we may acknowledge the impossibility of evolving a social order on earth in which the principles of ideal justice shall move automatically to their goal, it is none the less our duty to get as near this consummation ("so devoutly to be wished") as the conditions permit. In so far as we do this, we shall find that the true progress of the world will be in the line of realising the principles of reward expounded in these pages, and of making them operative as far as practicable in the mundane order. And we are helped to this conclusion by the consideration that there are many kinds of social reward capable of being bestowed on

men apart from the money they earn, and the material comforts they enjoy. These latter rewards indeed already form only a small part of the actual guerdon of service; they are but the material foundations of a very lofty and aerial structure. In actual life, we already estimate men's value and place in the order of merit by quite other criteria. Public service is rewarded by public honours far more than by the income it brings. Some of the most coveted positions are only to be won by men who approve themselves worthy by the loftiness of their character, and the disinterestedness of their motives. There are reputations more precious to such as can win them than untold wealth. The homage paid to those who fill the common mind with a sense of true benefit, whether through their public services, or their intellectual achievements, or their spiritual influence, is "more to be desired than gold, yea than much fine gold." There are a thousand subtle and effectual ways in which men can give to their benefactors a more or less adequate sense of their gratitude, and esteem, and honour.

What is needed is that these vague but efficient social rewards should first

be spiritualised, and then bestowed on the virtues and benefits that most deserve them. They will then be no barrier to disinterestedness and altruism of service; far from being incompatible with these virtues, they can only be called forth and bestowed as their proper and heartfelt recompense, and their bestowal will not depend on the mere sense of the magnitude of a man's services; they will be offered as much, and more, for their quality and spiritual value. Obscure persons will be felt to be entitled to them as truly as those prominent in the public gaze; they will be given as a tribute to a man's inherent worth, however small his gifts, and however narrow his opportunity. Our desire to honour others rises as often in view of what they are as of what they do.

All this testifies to the fact that the kingdom of heaven is already "among" us, and that the economics of Jesus have begun to leaven and purify men's views and estimates of life. So far, even after these centuries of Christian training and education, His principles of judgment are far from being accepted by His nominal followers; nay, too often His true disciples forget the lessons they have

learnt at His feet, and fall back on the crude measurements of value and material standards of judgment that govern the thoughts of the secular and unspiritual world. Only by slow insensible stages does His kingdom come among men; and it needs a large faith oftentimes to believe that it is progressing at all. None the less it is coming; and, appearances notwithstanding, we are entitled to believe that what we now catch in sudden glimpses and in "broken arcs" will, in His own good time, come almost in the "perfect round," and that not only "yonder, worlds away," but here, "on the homely earth." It is not a dream, but a prophecy, that some day the "trumpet of the seventh angel" shall sound, and great voices will follow in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever."

III.

Meanwhile, in what temper shall we do our work under the mixed and uncertain conditions of the world as it is? The millennium is still a dream on the

distant horizon. The man who would do the will of God in sincerity must be prepared to take many risks. His fellow men are not in a position to measure his worth, or to weigh the value of his deeds; they will often show an uncharitable, envious, or hostile attitude towards him; he may suffer from wilful misunderstanding or bitter enmity. Those who depend for their incentives to high living on the appreciation of those around them will be often subjected to sore discouragement. Some of the best benefactors of the race have slipped into their graves "unwept, unhonoured, and unsung."

There are only two ways of escape from the bitterness to which we are prone in view of these facts. One is to endeavour to "do good for its own sake"; to find our satisfaction in the simple sense of having done our duty. So far as it goes, this is a true refuge from the misrepresentation and ingratitude of the world, and there are men of such lofty ethical temper that it seems to suffice to keep them diligent, humble, and tireless in the way of service. Nevertheless, there is a better way, to those, at least, who superadd genuine religious faith to real ethical passion. It is to lean upon the truths

expounded in this little book, and to bear in mind the absolute justice and the unfailing benevolence of their heavenly Master and Lord. Nothing short of this can keep all but a select few superlatively endowed ethical souls faithful and unspoiled to the end.

St. Paul is a signal instance of the power of this motive to sweeten and steady the soul in the midst of life's manifold discouragements. In a passage of rare insight and beauty he lays bare his heart in view of this problem. "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment. Yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing against myself; yet am I not thereby justified; but He that judgeth me is the Lord."* Here we have four concentric circles of moral judgment in their order of importance. There is first, the loose and uncertain judgment of the wider public,—"man's judgment"; secondly, there is the better-informed but partial judgment of one's intimate friends,—"judged of you"; thirdly, there is a man's self-judgment,—"I judge . . . . mine own self"; and lastly there is the divine judgment,—"He that

*1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

judgeth me is the Lord." Paul was by disposition by no means indifferent to the popular verdict; and sturdy and independent as he was, there are many passages in his letter which show how he loved to be appreciated and approved by his friends. Still more was he anxious to fulfil the smallest dictate of his own conscience, which was sensitive, even tyrannous, to a degree. None the less he knew the fallibility of all human judgment, even of his own; and he was by no means satisfied to gain a verdict of acquittal in these earthly courts. "He that judgeth me is the lord"; and to find himself approved of Him was the dearest wish of his heart; knowing that nothing short of this would do in the great day of reckoning. But though St. Paul stood in deep awe of the all-seeing eye and infallible verdict of his Heavenly Lord, yet he was not in any way discouraged thereat. For he knew Him in whom he had believed; knew how wise and true, how sure and gracious His judgment of human life was, within and without, and how absolute was the certainty that God would give the "recompence of the reward," to all His servants with perfect justice

and unfailing kindness. Buoyed up by this belief he could afford to ignore the shallow criticism and the no less shallow praise of the world at large; he could afford to suffer misjudgment and alienation on the part of those in whose behalf he had laboured long at the risk of life itself; he could rise superior to his own self-complacency or self-blame, and rely with mistaken confidence on the "well-done" of his Master for all he had done in His name, and for humanity. Above all, he was inspired and steadied by the loftiness of his central motive in serving Him. A sense of boundless gratitude for the spiritual blessing brought within his reach in Christ filled his heart with perpetual praise, and made his feet swift and untiring in doing good. The fact that he could never repay this debt, while at the same time he was persuaded that his Lord and Master appreciated his every endeavour to serve Him, and that there was a "crown of rejoicing" awaiting him in the heavenly mansions, made him independent of human ingratitude, and kept his spirit sweet and unembittered to the end; while every sign of human appreciation and friendship was doubly

welcome, because it seemed to him an added, and possibly an unexpected reward.

There is still another aspect of these parables, in the prospect they open up of higher service hereafter as the reward of faithfulness here. It has always seemed, from an earthly standpoint, as though at death there must be a great loss of spiritual force in the passing away of great and good men and women. In that dread hour of change the accumulated influence of disciplined and sanctified character seems suddenly to go out by an analogous process to the dissipation of physical energy into space. Our Lord's teaching in these parables, in so far as it is eschatological, corrects this apparent anomaly of the divine government. Death is seen then to be not the diffusion and loss of spiritual energy, but only its transmutation. The powers exercised and brought to perfection will be used hereafter also, and will be started there at the point of efficiency reached by their possessors in this life. It will be part of the reward of heaven that the diligence and earnestness of our service on earth will count exactly for what it

is worth. Those qualified by the self-discipline, the devotion, the purity of their characters during the life of earthly service to take an honourable place in the hierarchies of heavenly service, will not fail of this prize of the high calling of God. Thus is our will braced up, our motives are strengthened, our heart encouraged to "buy" our earthly opportunity, and to turn the lower values of time into the higher equivalents of eternity. This life is not self-contained; it does not end at death; but all of worth which it accumulates through discipline and experience becomes so much stored-up capital for use in the Heavenly Kingdom. This is the central principle of the ECONOMICS OF JESUS.

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